

Central Blind Rehabilitation Center

Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital
Annual Perspective 2020

Highlights in Blind Rehabilitation Services

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Our Facility at Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, Hines IL



MISSION

To provide high-quality blind rehabilitation through the provision of a broad range of rehabilitation, education, and research/technology.



Message from the Chief

To our Stakeholders and Community Partners:

The resilience displayed in the last year has been amazing. Resilience in the staff to find new ways to reach our Veteran population and resilience in Veterans who keep pushing forward despite many obstacles.

Our new normal for most of this year became daily screening for staff to ensure our work force was healthy enough to serve our Veterans in a variety of modalities, which included virtual and outpatient forms. Even amongst the pandemic, all skill areas were able to provide some form of blind rehabilitation training.

For that we are encouraged and grateful. These new training modalities gave us the opportunity to develop our program offerings in ways we had not explored. It was an opportunity for growth and we took it!

Despite the challenges the pandemic presented, we maintained access to care in a variety of areas. Check out our ***Statistical Snapshot of 2020*** for details on our trends. All of our continuum of care modalities met the challenge.

We experienced some positive notoriety in a special edition of ***USA Today*** which encourages us to keep pushing forward and sets an example of all the possibilities visually impaired Veterans have available to them with the right assistance.

With the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine in late 2020, we are hopeful that 2021 will bring more familiar days for the staff, and for Veterans who are waiting to visit us in person to experience blind rehabilitation within our facility, and be amongst friends once again. Until then, we continue to offer blind rehabilitation through virtual and outpatient models and are developing virtual group class offerings that are scheduled to begin soon after the first of the year.

All the best to you in the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Van Koevering".

Denise Van Koevering, COMS, CLVT, VHA-CM
Chief, Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital

"A Blind Center is where faith is strongest; that blind people deserve hope, respect and freedom. These are accorded first, followed by the means of achieving them. Our civilization permits wholesome living when blind, and here, one learns how."

Our Profile



Our Management Team from top row left, D. Van Koevering, Chief; C. Brancheau, Assistant Chief; A. Cleveland, Orientation & Mobility; bottom row left, J. Molodecki, Manual Skills; M. Elgersma, Computer Access Technology/Visual Skills; L. McCarthy, Living Skills.

The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center (CBRC) is a 34-bed residential facility at Edwards Hines Jr. VA Hospital. The CBRC is one of 13 VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers located across the US and Puerto Rico. We accept applicants from 14 Midwest states in the Central Area Region as well as across the United States. Our central region field personnel, Visual Impairment Team Coordinators (VIST), are 41 strong and work within communities of those 14 states to locate Veterans in need of blind rehabilitation services. We provide blind rehabilitation services including five distinct skill areas; Orientation & Mobility, Living Skills, Visual Skills, Manual Skills, and Computer Access Training. These areas are supplemented by Recreation Therapy, Social Work, and Psychology disciplines that all work together with clinical staff, including a physical medicine Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, and Nursing, to support a successful blind rehabilitation experience. In addition to inpatient blind rehabilitation services, we also offer a Low Vision Outpatient Clinic, as well as Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services (BROS) Rural Health within a 100 mile radius, and Polytrauma—Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) BROS, that supports a population of Veterans experiencing functional vision loss due to multiple traumas to the brain.

Profile Snapshot

Staff

- Instructors- 43.5
- VIST- 41
- Clinical- 15
- Admin Support- 6
- Rec Therapy 1

Students/ Fellows/ Residents

- Fellow (s)- 1
- Residents- 3
- Students- 15
- Academic Affiliations- 8
- Volunteers - 7

Facility

- Operating Beds-34
- Class Rooms— 34
- Gym
- Training Apartment

Specialty Services

- Polytrauma TBI BROS
- Rural Health BROS
- Recreation Therapy
- Low Vision Optometry

Noteworthy Notoriety

USA Today Special Edition Health & Healing featured a piece on VA Blind Rehabilitation Service and how it serves as *“one of the most powerful vehicles for blind-ed veterans to regain their independence.”*

Hines VA Blind Rehabilitation Center was cited by an Army Veteran who received services at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, stating *“The training was superb.”* That Veteran is now a government and law professor at Rochester University in suburban Detroit.

Some of the best outreach comes from success stories told by the very Veterans we serve.

Community Awareness

Visitors

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic limited our abilities to reach out to community partners and stakeholders. However, despite this barrier, we continually connected with internal and external partners to increase awareness of our program and services while educating the community on blindness. This year, we logged 219 hours of education for 31 visitors who ranged from Family Program participants, health care students, and associated health career individuals.

Outreach Education 2020

Over 50% of the staff seek out opportunities to serve the community through Professional outlets.

- 16% of staff serve on a professional board
- 34% of staff serve as members of a professional organization
- 9% of staff presented at a conference or in the community



Program Accomplishments

Outpatient Services

Blind Rehabilitation

Outpatient Referrals were accepted beginning August 1, 2020. A total of 26 Outpatient programs and 221 outpatient visits occurred through September 30, 2020, which was the end of the Fiscal Year 2020.

Unprecedented and never before offered, outpatient classes were offered in all skill areas on a daily basis.

VA Video Connect (VVC) Blind Rehabilitation

A total of 217 VA Video Connect (VVC) programs occurred in 2020.

All inpatients were discharged by April 4, 2020. With no access to inpatient care, maintaining blind rehabilitation services and training required a change in how services were offered. As a result, virtual appointments became the primary modality for services during the COVID –19 pandemic.

Patient Fall Prevention Program

A 65% decrease in falls were indicated compared to 2019 inpatient fall statistics early in the fiscal year (October-March 2019).

Efforts to decrease patient falls continued to achieve improved outcomes. Education early in the patient's admission, along with increased awareness of Nursing Fall Assessment scores, monitoring for trends, and initiating action plans, proved to be successful in the first two quarters of the fiscal year.

Resilience in 2020

Despite pandemic barriers beginning in March 2020, staff continued to soldier on in other and creative ways to still bring some level of care, resources, and hope to our Veterans and Active Duty Service Members (ADSM) who are blinded and visually impaired.

Virtual services increased, and outpatient blind rehabilitation provided options for services. While nothing can replace inpatient training, this year's accomplishments forged new pathways for blind rehabilitation services.

Access to Care

Our statistical snapshot for 2020 is divided into Pre-COVID-19 and pandemic response modes. With the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the spring of 2020, our response resulted in discharging all blind rehabilitation inpatients as of April 4, 2020.

From April 5, 2020 through September 30, 2020, access to blind rehabilitation services went virtual, including telehealth and VA Video Connect (VVC). Existing Outpatient Services such as our Outpatient Low Vision clinic, BROS Rural Health and Polytrauma TBI resumed in July, incorporating new screening protocols for staff and Veterans.

Statistical Snapshot 2020

Outpatient Low Vision Clinic

A total of 233 Outpatient Visits occurred in 2020

Low Vision Clinic served 111 new patients and 122 return patients.

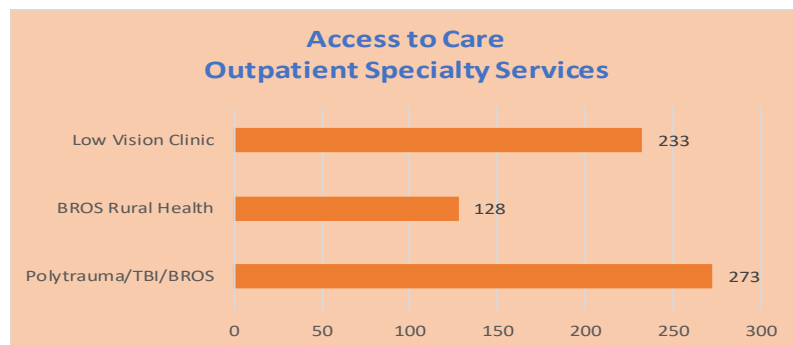
(BROS) Rural Health

A total of 128 Veterans were served under BROS Rural Health

A reduced number of referrals were received as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Outpatient Services for BROS Rural Health occurred only during roughly 42% of the year.

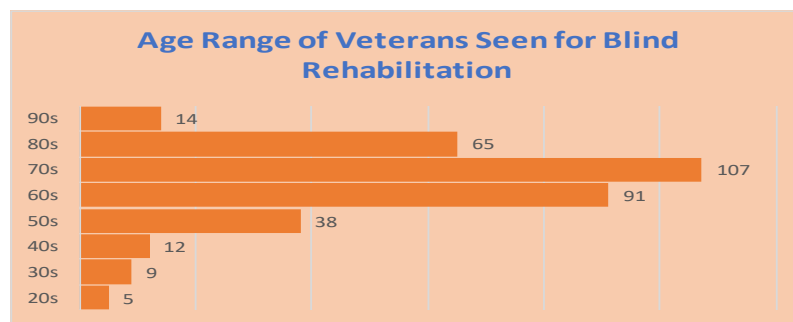
(BROS) Polytrauma TBI

A combined total of 273 Veterans were served including TBI, BROS, and Polytrauma services.



AGE RANGE

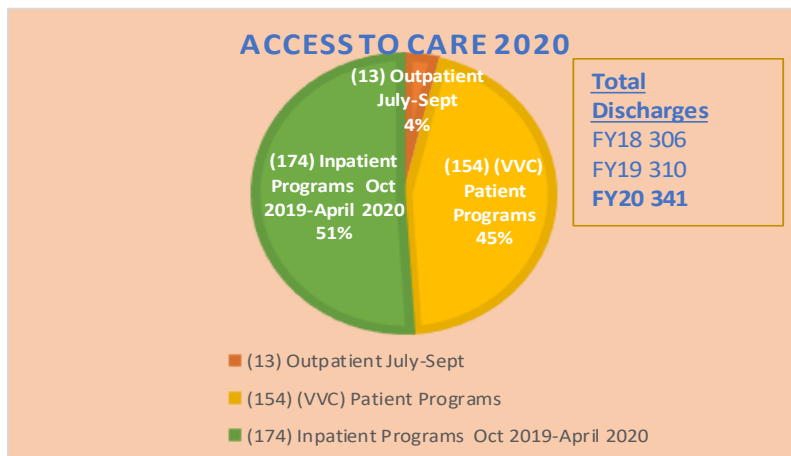
The average age of Veterans seen for comprehensive blind rehab was 69.



Statistical Snapshot 2020 Cont.

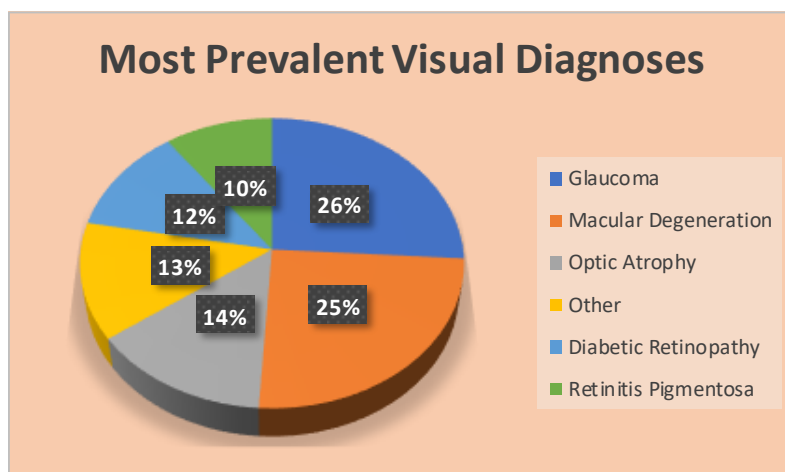
Access to Blind Rehabilitation Services

*Despite pandemic challenges, Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center not only maintained access to care but also increased the total number of Veterans served, compared to previous **fiscal years** (October 1-September 30) . This increase was largely due to the implementation of virtual care.*



Other Trends

Regardless of the pandemic, pre-existing medical diagnoses and most prevalent visual diagnosis remain consistent with past years with diabetes, glaucoma, and macular degeneration leading the trend. Diabetes consisted of 43% of pre-existing medical diagnoses of Veterans seen in 2020.



Access to Care Cont.

Subsequently Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services were established and implemented for local area Veterans who could travel back and forth to the Center in reasonable time frames. Referrals for Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation services were accepted beginning August 1, 2020, and ran through the end of the fiscal year September 30, 2020.

Contributors for the 2020 report include:

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C. Walker, Polytrauma BROS

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